

# NATO's Military Future

By DANIEL W. CHRISTMAN

**H**ohenfels is a household name to many American soldiers. For decades, 7<sup>th</sup> Army trained in this part of Germany for large scale mechanized combat on the plains of Central Europe. While the old Warsaw Pact that provided the focus of that training has disappeared, our soldiers still hone their combat skills—from tank gunnery to small unit maneuvers—there and at nearby Grafenwoehr. Even though tank main gun rounds are still cracking down range, profound changes are underway at the 7<sup>th</sup> Army training center: former Cold War warriors of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s would be struck by its transformation. Hohenfels remains capable of accommodating thousands of troops in a combat maneuver setting. But of equal importance, it is also now a proving ground for the new NATO non-article V missions that extend beyond collective defense.

This capability was illustrated vividly when Secretary of Defense William Perry toured Hohenfels and Grafenwoehr in November 1995 to observe the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division preparing for the Bosnia operation. First he visited a range where M1A1 crews were firing qualification tables for tank gunnery. Less than an hour later, he encountered American soldiers at mock villages in peasant costumes and assorted uniforms playing Bosnians, Croats, and Serbs. Hohenfels proved to be ideal as a setting in which to prepare troops for the Implementation Force (IFOR), just as it had prepared troops for armored mobile warfare in past years.



DOD (R.D. Ward)

There is tremendous symbolism in the Hohenfels of the mid-1990s. While tank gunnery is the traditional NATO article V mission of collective defense, mock villages and role playing represent the new NATO role in operations other than war. This highlights an essential truth: the military future of NATO depends on achieving a balance between continuity and change. For the United States in particular, this means balancing readiness and training for high intensity combat with preparation for non-article V operations such as those in the former Yugoslavia. European militaries, on the other hand, must maintain their combat competencies in the rush to adopt new missions. Striking an appropriate balance is not easy, especially in a period of sharply constrained resources.

## Continuity

Any discussion of NATO's military future should begin with the theme of continuity since that is the foundation for NATO adaptation. As adaptation proceeds, it is crucial that the Alliance not divest itself of the fundamentals that have

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served it so well in the past. Rather than remaking NATO, we must build on the qualities and attributes that have made it a success.

It is useful to recall the agreed Alliance approach to security, one only recently reconfirmed. In the 1991 strategic concept NATO recognized that "The military dimension remains essential. Maintaining an adequate military capability and clear preparedness to act collectively in the common defense remain central to the Alliance's security objectives."<sup>1</sup> This mission requires a capability to guarantee the territorial integrity and fundamental security interests of all Alliance members as well as politico-military decisionmaking structures and procedures needed to effectively employ forces.

NATO military authorities have normally achieved this mission with capable conventional forces, integrated military command structure, and workable standardization agreements. The benefits

of such capabilities were obvious to the world during Desert Storm. The seamless integration of NATO ground and air assets by the coalition contributed significantly to the defeat of a regional hegemon whose antics threatened not just regional stability but the interests of Alliance members thousands of miles from the Persian Gulf.

But core military capabilities are not only decisive for a contingency like the Persian Gulf. They are also important for reasons closer to home in Brussels. First, an adequate conventional force structure offers a rotation and training base for non-article V missions such as the Balkans. Regrettably, some NATO land component force structures have been cut so severely that many countries find it difficult to sustain more than a battalion-sized deployment for an extended period. This reality will hopefully provide a floor under existing structures and lead to a review of the adequacy of conventional capabilities for a range of NATO missions. As an aside, the French, though not currently fully integrated, are the first of our major European partners to recognize the need to fundamentally restructure their forces to make them deployable and sustainable in sufficient numbers to deal with likely challenges.

Second, the great increase in military-to-military contact programs with Central and Eastern European nations highlights the importance of an adequate structure with which forces can interact and train. For North America, this means staying engaged on the continent. For Europe, it means retaining sufficient structure for Central

and Eastern European nations to realize their expectations with regard to contact with the West.

The final reason relates to reconstituting conventional defense capabilities by the Alliance should a major threat materialize in the future. Leadership development is widely recognized as the long pole in the tent in this reconstitution effort. Force reductions—clearly necessary in the wake of the Warsaw Pact's dissolution—must not leave the Alliance with an inadequate basis for leadership development; that is, too few units into which developing leaders can be integrated. Nations must ensure that new generations of military leaders can both learn and practice military fundamentals. If we forget this important point, we dangerously mortgage the Alliance's future.

We need, in short, to ensure we do not lose our core combat competencies and structures as we embrace new missions. Collective defense remains the fundamental purpose of NATO and should be the basis for a rational transformation of the Alliance to respond to new demands. Non-article V capabilities are derivative from article V requirements—not the reverse.

We also need to preserve and build on structures and procedures that enable 16 sovereign nations to discuss and agree to political objectives, then transform the objectives into guidance for NATO military authorities. This is a unique strength of NATO which must be preserved.

### **Change**

However profound the changes over the past six years have been for the Alliance, the next six years are likely to create an even greater transformation of European security space. As one analyst noted, NATO is being reinvigorated in unanticipated ways, not simply by its participation in IFOR, but also as a result of the prospect of enlargement.<sup>2</sup> In this light, three challenges are likely to arise for those serving the Alliance in uniform.

*Operations.* We must ensure that our conceptual differences over reorganizing NATO do not stand in the way of undertaking new tasks, even if that means an *ad hoc* organizational response to get the operation off the ground. NATO simply cannot be paralyzed by debates on theory. The Alliance deployment to the Balkans is a reassuring case in point. Currently 60,000 NATO troops are deployed there, and earlier deployments under Sharp Guard and Deny Flight reflect ministerial and head of state decisions in London, Rome, and Oslo that endorsed NATO peacekeeping activities. Participants at the meetings may not have envisioned the scope of these deployments; but they did recognize the need to broaden the traditional NATO approach to military involvement as well as to alter structures and procedures to facilitate new operations.

## **some NATO countries find it difficult to sustain more than a battalion-sized deployment**

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**U.S. and Russian commanders at Tuzla air base.**



Combat Camera Imagery (Ken Bergmann)



**Unloading C-130 in Sarajevo for Joint Endeavor.**

interoperability experience, and we about them, than could be learned in a decade of seminars and classroom instruction.

Nothing could be more illustrative than the operational integration of Russian and French forces in IFOR. Their incorporation on the practical level is proceeding extremely efficiently. On Russian integration, a significant effort was made last autumn by Generals Joulwan and Shevstov, endorsed by their respective defense ministers, to get the military playbook for Bosnia right. And they succeeded. The effectiveness of this coordination in Mons and Brussels has been evident on the ground with the remarkably smooth inclusion of the Russians in the U.S. sector. The Russian brigade serves under the tactical control of General Nash, commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division, and receives operational instructions from General Joulwan through General Shevstov. One will not find this command arrangement in any field manual, but it works. As one senior officer in theater remarked, the relationship between General Nash and his counterpart is "as good as you can get."

Further, the Russian troops, operating in a particularly delicate and difficult area of Bosnia, have shown great professionalism and serious commitment to the mission. All indications are that interoperability between the Russian Federation and NATO is both feasible and practical. Clearly, there is potential for combined operations on a larger scale. As Secretary Perry has stressed in

Unfortunately, the deliberate pace of restructuring the Alliance internally was overtaken by the more dramatic and more rapid pace of external events. As a result, NATO has been forced to adapt on the fly. Although it has been a difficult and at times frustrating path to get to this point, operations on the military side are proceeding superbly. This is largely true because NATO members have not waited to get the theory right before acting. As some observers have said, we are literally reconstructing the Alliance "brick by brick, from the ground up; it's not the theory that is going to drive the practice but the practice that will drive the theory."<sup>3</sup>

Secretary Perry placed this point in context when he addressed the Wehrkunde conference in Munich on February 4, 1996. "It is in Bosnia, where future NATO members are showing themselves ready and able to shoulder the burdens . . .," he stated. "It is in Bosnia where we are showing that we can work as partners with Russian forces. Bosnia is not a peacekeeping exercise; it is the real thing." The members of the Partnership for Peace (PFP), including Russia, are likely to learn more about us from this year of practical

U.S. Air Force (Jeffrey Allen)

this regard, Russia and NATO *do* have a special relationship in Bosnia; every day that the Russian brigade commander, Colonel Lenstov, engages with General Nash displays Russia's commitment to participate in the future security architecture of Europe. It is a perfect example of building the new NATO architecture from the ground up, brick by brick.<sup>4</sup> These are important bricks.

Similarly, French integration has not been an issue during the IFOR deployment. As any American officer with NATO experience can attest, on

the practical military level, U.S. forces have always worked superbly with their French counterparts. Desert Storm and Bosnia highlight that fundamental point. Differences do exist at the policy level about the the-

ory behind non-article V operations. However, theoretical differences expressed in Brussels or elsewhere have not blocked progress on the ground. As with NATO's Russian experience, the challenge will be to take the practical lessons learned in standing up IFOR and use them in finalizing the architectural drawings of the new European security structure.

Notwithstanding the success in interoperability and coordination demonstrated in Bosnia, at some point we must draw on these experiences and implement the restructuring that has been long studied. When this is done, we must ensure that a coherent and integrated alliance remains, one that can carry out military operations across a spectrum of missions it may be called on to perform. NATO must be careful not to establish military, crisis management, or military planning committees which function uniquely for non-article V missions. In the short term, we simply cannot afford two alliances. And, in the long term, bifurcation in the approach to non-article V and article V missions is a certain way to disengage this hemisphere from the European continent.

*Internal Adaptation.* The second issue has already been suggested: the Alliance must ensure that it does in fact adapt itself internally to respond even more efficiently to new missions and political requirements down the road. The need for such adaptation was recognized at least two years ago. At that time, military authorities were advised that expenditures on NATO overhead would soon crowd out nearly all operational and discretionary funding for key programs such as PFP. The NATO Senior Resource Board concluded that the Alliance could no longer accept salami tactics in budgetary and structural cuts. This realization prompted the NATO chiefs of defense to commission a long-term study (LTS) to streamline

the NATO command structure. LTS is a crucial element in the process of examining and transforming the Alliance.

Besides resource priorities, however, other issues are impacting the outcome of the study. First is the realization that we must move from an essentially static, defense-oriented structure to one that is more flexible, mobile, and responsive in a crisis—that is, to one more reflective of the Alliance's new strategic concept. The recent announcement by France that it intends to participate more actively in the military activities of the Alliance has also impacted on the study. The decision reveals, in part, a growing realization in Paris that the so-called European pillar must be grounded within the Alliance, not separate from it. In fact, France has, for all practical purposes, abandoned the notion of a two-pillar alliance in favor of an enhanced European role in NATO.

The overall goal of this internal examination must be to strengthen the ability of the Alliance to respond to a variety of crises while maintaining its core mission of collective defense—and to do so while cutting overhead in a manner which respects regional sensitivities. This will not be easy, but NATO military authorities are already some distance toward this goal.

One element of this organizational evolution merits special mention: the combined joint task force (CJTF). This is a concept that would extend the strength of the integrated military structure into new mission areas and more easily accommodate operations outside the territorial limits of the 16 NATO members. CJTF also facilitates the inclusion of PFP nations in non-article V operations such as Joint Endeavor in Bosnia.

The NATO Military Committee agreed on six principles for CJTF development to guide the Alliance as it comes to closure on this important internal adaptation:

- preserve the integrated military structure
- provide for separable but not separate forces in support of European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI)
- maintain a single command structure for article V and non-article V missions
- retain the role of the Military Committee in advising and transmitting strategic guidance from the North Atlantic Council (NAC) to NATO Military Authorities<sup>5</sup>
- avoid *ad hoc* participation in NATO bodies
- preserve the ability of Major NATO Commands to do timely contingency planning.

NATO member countries are close to agreement on this concept. Although we have cut through theological arguments in the field to establish several CJTFs (for example, Sharp Guard,

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**Italian troops during Strong Resolve.**



U.S. Navy (Mark Therien)



**Landing craft crossing Norwegian fjord.**

U.S. Navy (Franklin P. Call)

Deny Flight, and Joint Endeavor), it is time to stop doing things on an ad hoc basis and implement a badly needed structural reform.

More broadly, it is imperative that we get on with a more sweeping structural adaptation of the Alliance for future operations and implement quickly those aspects most important to meeting the new security challenges to European stability. We cannot afford to continually study the issue. Instead, we must take the lessons learned from the ongoing IFOR deployment and institutionalize the 90 percent solution. Structures and procedures can be further refined as the Alliance grows.

NATO and PFP. Internal change will not be enough. For long-term viability, NATO must adapt externally. Initiatives such as NATO enlargement, a formalized NATO-Russia relationship, and PFP represent important measures that project stability and security to the East. Because of the central role which NATO's military is playing and must continue to play in PFP, however, this program will be the focus of the third and final challenge.

Few understand what the projection of stability means in practice. Consider two examples drawn from recent NATO experience with PFP. The first took place in the midst of the euphoria that accompanied the launching of PFP, prior to the Budapest summit conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in December 1994. At the time Hungary and Romania were resisting practical steps toward military cooperation partly because of the traditional ethnic tension. Yet, prodded by the West and the realization that these differences were impeding integration in European security institutions, the two countries scheduled unprecedented combined ground and air maneuvers on and over each other's territory. This small but significant step added a measure of stability to an historically unsettled part of the continent.

Perhaps a more timely example is the 1995 naval exercise sponsored by Bulgaria under PFP.

## PFP enables nations to evolve toward the political-military structures common to the Alliance

Bulgaria served as the bridge between Turkey and Greece to reduce tension in the Eastern Mediterranean. Despite being members of NATO, both

nations have traditionally found it difficult to exercise side-by-side; but for at least one month, PFP helped to lower a significant barrier to

stability in the Alliance by bringing them together in a military training setting.

This partnership is one of the most important security investments the Alliance can make. PFP enables nations in Central and Eastern Europe to establish true interoperability with Alliance forces and, perhaps more significantly, to evolve toward the political-military structures and habits of cooperation common to the Alliance.

A quick review of PFP activities shows just how far we have come in the past two years in reducing the barriers that for so long artificially divided Europe:

- 27 nations have joined the partnership.
- Partnership coordination cells have been established in Mons at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe to conduct the military planning needed to implement partnership programs; there is also representation at NATO headquarters in Brussels.
- Partner nations have conducted nearly 50 exercises throughout both Central and Eastern Europe and on NATO allied territory, including at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, Louisiana.
- Partnership programs have moved beyond simple tactical skills, incorporating a range of military as well as political-military elements.
- Most noteworthy is participation by 13 partner nations in the NATO-led IFOR mission in Bosnia, with their forces working side-by-side with the Alliance in a peacekeeping operation.

Despite tangible accomplishments, much remains to be done. NATO is postured to take the partnership to an essential second stage of maturation. In this regard, we must strengthen the defense planning element of the partnership to accelerate the movement of partner nations toward higher levels of interoperability. This planning process, which has existed within the Alliance for decades, has provided a remarkable mechanism for integrating national forces into an interoperable whole. In fact, defense planning is the foundation on which the highly effective NATO military structure is built. It is now time to extend a version of that mechanism into the partnership. This will reap enormous benefits for NATO, profoundly deepening cooperation and also preparing the willing and able for eventual membership in the Alliance.

Further, the Alliance must transform PFP exercises into a robust, integrated program, built on

unglamorous but essential training events. This would eventually lead to conducting complex, large, free-play exercises that extend partner capabilities in agreed mission areas of peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and search and rescue. Partners must, in turn, expand their representation at Mons and Brussels; they must also ensure that representatives are properly qualified, so they can conduct detailed accession negotiations which, for some, surely lie ahead.

Perhaps most importantly, the Alliance must ensure that PFP has the resources to meet its goals. U.S. contributions totaled \$130 million for 1995-96 which reflects the importance attached to the program and our leadership. We must ensure that this critical program is similarly resourced by our allies in the out years. Funding is literally the lifeblood of the partnership.

During the summit in Brussels in January 1994 the North Atlantic Council reaffirmed that NATO remains the core security institution in Europe as well as the forum for U.S. engagement there. As the participants agreed: "We confirm the enduring validity and indispensability of our Alliance. It is based on a transatlantic link, the expression of a shared destiny. It is reaching out to establish new patterns of cooperation throughout Europe."<sup>6</sup>

The United States sees, and must continue to see, an important role in this shared destiny. This is reflected in our national military strategy by the central role accorded engagement. We have learned at great cost, in two world wars in this century, the significance of both engagement on the continent and continued U.S. leadership. The somber and majestic American cemeteries which dot the European landscape speak clearly of that commitment to Europe and of the role of institutions such as NATO in maintaining this vital linkage during a time of unprecedented change. **JFQ**

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "The Alliance's Strategic Concept," *NATO Handbook* (Brussels: NATO Office of Information and Press, 1995), p. 241.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Pond, "Europe Welcomes American Military Leadership," *The Wall Street Journal* (European Edition), December 6, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The three NATO Military Authorities are the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic.

<sup>6</sup> *NATO Handbook*, p. 242.